

## THE TEXAS MEDICAL RANGERS AND THOUSANDS OF PATIENTS<sup>e</sup>

Sergeant First Class Brenda Benner, TXARNG

In 2006, medical professionals from the Texas Army National Guard, the Texas State Guard and numerous local and state agencies offered thousands of low-income Rio Grande Valley residents an opportunity to see a doctor, dentist or nurse during the seven year old annual summertime humanitarian mission known as Operation Lone Star.

For those who lack access to affordable health care, Operation Lone Star provides basic dental care, medical exams, blood pressure and diabetes screenings, and also timely immunizations for children preparing for school. Temporary on-site pharmacies offered limited prescription medications at no charge to patients that could not otherwise afford them.

The Texas State Guard provided many of the personnel needed to keep up with the flow of thousands of patients divided among several makeshift clinics, most of which were set up at local elementary schools.

The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), an organization within the Texas State Guard, was first activated in February 2003. The first unit was based at the University of Texas Health Science Center-San Antonio. Since then, regional groups have been established in Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, Tyler and San Antonio among others. Recruitment is approaching 400 members.

A component of the Texas Military Forces, the MRC serves under the Adjutant General of the State of Texas and at the discretion of Texas Governor Rick Perry. It consists of medical professionals who volunteer their valuable skills to support public health agencies in times of state-wide emergencies. Known informally as Texas Medical Rangers, they train for a variety of public health emergencies ranging from natural disasters to outbreaks of contagious diseases, to the effects of chemical or radiological attacks. The volunteers augmented medical service to people who evacuated to Texas last year from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita evacuees. The Texas Medical Rangers also provide medical support during large-scale public events such as the annual multiple sclerosis 150-mile bike ride from Houston to Austin.

During the 2006 Operation Lone Star mission, Medical Rangers worked side-by-side with other nurses, doctors, therapists, public health officials and even students from several medical specialty training colleges. They helped patients with their in-processing paperwork, recorded their medical histories, took their blood pressure readings and temperatures, performed blood sugar screening, filled prescriptions, administered immunizations and provided medical exams.

“It’s nice having all of the military people here helping us,” said Rosie Bryan, a public health specialist from the Hidalgo County Health Department. “They helped us process hundreds of patients at this site in one day.”

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<sup>e</sup> For additional information about the Texas State Guard Medical Reserve Corps, The Texas Medical Rangers, go to [www.texasmedicalrangers.com](http://www.texasmedicalrangers.com). The authors of this article may be reached at National Guard Public Affairs, P.O. Box 5218, Austin TX 78763-5218; (512) 782-6242 or (512) 657-8654 (cell).

<b>Report Documentation Page</b>			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>		
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE <b>2006</b>	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2006 to 00-00-2006</b>			
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>The Texas Medical Rangers and Thousands of Patients</b>		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER			
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER			
		5e. TASK NUMBER			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>State Defense Force Publication Center, 19819 Maycrest Way, Germantown, MD, 20876-6339</b>		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER			
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)			
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)			
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES <b>See also ADA494463. Pub in: State Defense Force Journal, Vol. 2, Issue 2, Fall 2006. © 2008 State Defense Forces Publications Center. Creative Commons Attribution License.</b>					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>4</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

The humanitarian mission gains momentum every year as more Rio Grande Valley residents utilize the clinics and more volunteers offer their medical expertise. This year, during a nine-day treatment period, more than 7,000 patients sought and obtained assistance. Nearly 4,000 immunizations were administered while approximately 4,500 diabetes screenings were performed. Approximately 2,000 patients received free prescription medications.

"Our success is due to teamwork," said Texas Medical Ranger 2LT Sharon Bayer, a licensed vocational nurse from Boerne, near San Antonio. "We get a lot of support from the various county and city organizations, like the school districts that let us use their buildings."

Medical Ranger MAJ Deborah Brooks, a chief nurse with the Tyler-based unit, said the integration among the Texas Army National Guard, the Texas State Guard and the medical personnel from the civilian health agencies was going well.

"I can tell there's mutual respect among everyone I've encountered," Brooks said. "I haven't seen any 'turf wars'; we're all one big family."

The commanding general of the Texas State Guard MRC, BG Marshall H. Scantlin, expressed his satisfaction during a visit to the make-shift clinic at Chapa Elementary School in La Joya.

"The teamwork between the units of the joint medical task force is obvious," he said.

Medical professionals don't join the Texas Medical Rangers for the money, but rather for the opportunity to help others while they increase their overall public health knowledge while working outside their normal job positions.

SGT Olivia Anderson, an emergency room paramedic at the Medical Center of Lewisville, meticulously poked and squeezed patients' fingers for the tiny bead of blood she needed for their glucose readings. Sergeant Anderson, who is used to more drama and more blood than she encountered at her screening station, said that even performing a simple task is worthwhile.

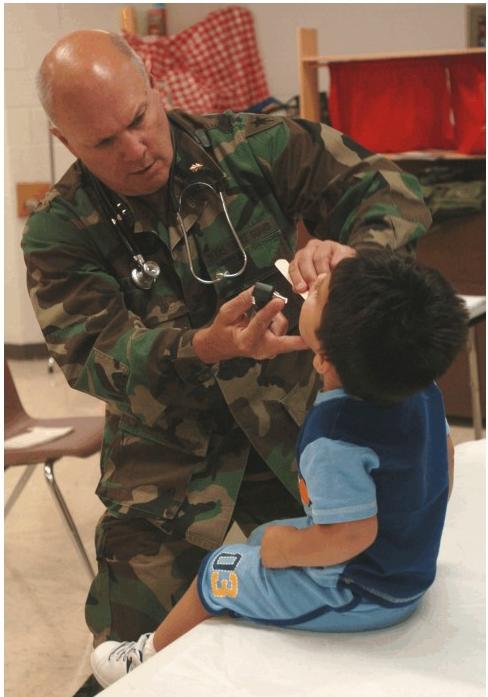
"I joined the Rangers so that I could have part-time ties with the military and still have my civilian life to complete all of my medical training," Sergeant Anderson said. "I love this; it's rewarding. I'm able to give of myself, to use my medical skills to help others."

With reliable support from the Texas Medical Rangers, Operation Lone Star's annual success will undoubtedly continue in the tradition of "Texans serving Texans."<sup>f</sup>

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<sup>f</sup> For pictures of some of the Texas Medical Rangers in action see the Attachment below.

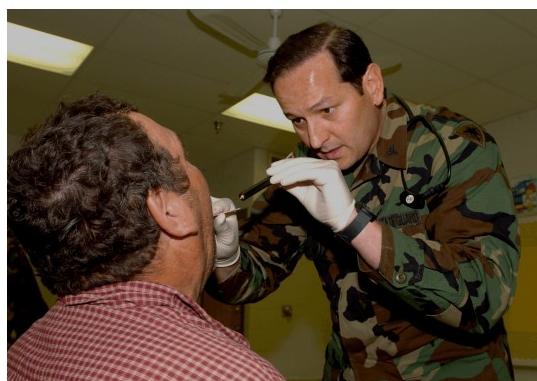
## APPENDIX



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